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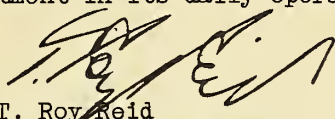
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of Personnel

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3 LESS FATIGUE MORE WORK²

The following article was prepared by T. Swann Harding, Editor of "USDA" based on his observations during a long period of service in the Department. He has also received a large amount of "Fan Mail" concerning personnel utilization, and it has been of considerable use in developing the thoughts which are set forth here. It is thought provoking and is being reproduced in the interest of improving the service rendered by the Department in its daily operations.



T. Roy Reid
Director of Personnel

More and Better Work in the Same Time With Less Effort and FatigueJob Habits

Train yourself to go to work immediately you arrive on the job, not after a leisurely warm-up period of dawdling, gossiping, and sighing, shuffling papers and going through unnecessary motions. A little practice will enable you to start right in. If coffee or a cigarette sets off your timing mechanism or primes your conditioned reflex for work, resort to them temperately.

Learn to change off from one sort of work to another--typing to telephoning, dictation to adding machine, laboratory work to writing up notes or preparing papers -- smoothly and without necessity for a period of reflection and introspection.

Plan your work in some orderly fashion to avoid the aimless paper shuffling and futile picking up and laying down that can become habitual. Cultivate the technique of dovetailing one job into another. Do this in the office, in routine laboratory work, wherever possible. Evaluate your jobs and the care and energy you put into them. Make a (neat) list of your tasks to focus attention on each in turn, striking them off as performed. Be not overslow, overconscientious, nor overmeticulous with jobs that require only ordinary care.

Never form the habit of laying aside your more difficult tasks in hopes they will just go away if you don't notice them. Time has proved they do not vanish, nor are you any more likely to perform them at some designated future time than NOW.

All of us work best at certain hours of the day. Use these consistently for your harder tasks, but don't be so temperamental as to work well only at 2 a.m. or in a nearby snack bar! The temperamental eccentricity of many a scientist is a pose rather than a necessity. After natural fatigue sets in you can still do the little routine jobs, but pick your best hours for the harder ones.

Tackle your big and difficult tasks a step at a time, a process at a time. Do not let the whole avalanche of work they seem to present slide over your rails and bring you to a dead stop while you go into a working daze. Inch ahead. No bit of hill climbing is ever so difficult if you advance only step by step.

Avoid what might be called make-work habits. You can become so fascinated by the functioning of certain office machines that you perform really unnecessary work

with them. A scientist in his laboratory can become so infatuated with some new equipment or processes as to forget his main line of endeavor and accomplishment. Be clear always as to your main objective and strive directly towards it.

Communications

Abbreviate your talks with visitors, telephone conversations, and conferences just as much as you can without losing their value. They can easily begin to run on and on while you are unconscious of the fact, and you and others talk in circles, saying many things that do not need to be uttered.

When possible, avoid telephoning unless your kind of job requires it. The person you try to reach is not always available. When and if he calls back, your mood or the picture has changed. Replace as many phone conversations as you can with typed chits on small notepaper bearing your name, agency, and room number--telephone number optional: Agreements made by telephone are apt to vanish from the mind of the other fellow. But the chit remains to face him until he performs the task or assigns it. When he assigns it, he passes along your written instructions as you prepared them, carrying full and complete information undistorted as it would become when transmitted in conversation.

Never neglect communications. They are very important. They must be such that the information which should seep down and all around actually does so. The office grapevine is no substitute. All who work in an organization must be fully conversant with the accurate information they require to do an efficient, effective job. Use bulletin boards, circulating memoranda, and meetings judiciously here.

Use small mimeographed chits to answer questions commonly asked, to give instructions, provide needful information, and reply to some correspondence. A politely worded rubber stamp or a typed sentence on the bottom can be used to answer many letters that do not require filing.

No project in scientific research is completed until the information developed has been recorded and disseminated. Writing the scientific paper as clearly as possible in order to communicate the new knowledge obtained by research is quite as necessary and important a process as the laboratory work. Research without communication is void.

Supervisors

Avoid dictation to stenographers if you can. It is time-consuming and inefficient unless the person doing the dictating does it really well. Learn to rough out on a typewriter, or in longhand if you write legibly, the material you yourself must prepare anyway. Then it can be clean-copied by any girl in any pool at any time. Then you will not be all at sea because a particular stenographer who has secreted your material in her own private language is sick or otherwise unavailable to transcribe from her notebook. Cutting dictation to the least possible minimum is a great time-saver. The dictaphone can, of course, be helpful to those who make skilled use of it.

Shorten your letters and memoranda drastically. The shorter any written document is, provided the essentials are retained, the more likely it is to be read and used, the less likely it is to be misinterpreted and cause trouble. Avoid writing formal letters and memoranda whenever the same matter can be handled quite as well with highly informal chits or a notation on the incoming letter or memorandum.

Tactfully avoid social visits when you can. If you must consult someone, go preferably to his office rather than having him come to yours. You can probably leave his office when you please but may be unable to get him to quit yours at will. It is bad enough to loaf but far worse to keep others from working while you do so.

Make definite appointments for definite purposes. Do not let one pile up on another. Do not prolong your consultations unnecessarily to make you think you work hard.

Call conferences only when necessary to determine policies or to bring useful information to an entire group. Never let them get out of hand. Open and close them promptly. If you are chairman, prevent rambling. Gently insist that those who attend stick to the point. See that they come equipped with reliable terminal facilities.

Get rid of inherited or acquired deadwood, if you can't train them to do effective work even if this involves some unpleasantness. Eradicate those who might better be paid to remain at home. Do something about the chronic fighters, the slow, lazy, and temperamental. Temperament is suffered too willingly even at supervisory levels. So are hour-cutting and flexible luncheon periods. Too many supervisors like all the advantages and privileges that go with supervisory positions but lack the integrity conscientiously to perform the duties and attend the responsibilities. You can easily get into the habit of dawdling over lunch with others with whom you talk shop and bring yourself to believe you are accomplishing something when you are merely being convivial, congenial, and time-wasting. Not even all laboratory chatter is necessary and helpful.

Attain your objectives by leadership rather than by so called top-sergeant methods: Telling those you supervise what to do, denying them full information upon the basis of which to operate and make decisions effectively, and refusing to listen to their views.

Above all make prompt decisions. Adhere to them. Better a prompt and partly wrong decision, often, than a fully correct one arrived at far too late to be useful or effectual.

Draw lines of authority clearly. When delegating responsibility, give the authority that goes along with it. Make your job instructions clear-cut and preferably in writing. But think clearly, for then only can you write clearly. Obscure writing wastes more time than sluggards.

Provide suitable incentives for those who work under you, not just money, but also credit, recognition, and a relationship that will make them feel you do not regard them as mere inanimate equipment. If you are top man in the laboratory, let subordinates sign their own papers and take rightful credit for the research they have done. See that your employees have suitable equipment also a good lighting, proper ventilation, typewriters and office machines in good repair, comfortable chair, proper laboratory facilities, and so on. Only then can they be expected to work efficiently.

Those Supervised

Carry out your assignments without having to be checked and rechecked. Any failure of yours to do so, even when instructions are given sometime ahead, is time-consuming and inefficient.

Learn to read carefully and to follow written instructions accurately. Learn also to listen carefully and to acquire as many different skills as you can.

Whether your memory is faulty, or not, it is good to use a system of written reminders or a tickler file of some kind that brings up jobs to be done at future dates without fail. This will also enable others to carry on when you are absent.

Detach your mind from household tasks and personal problems during work hours. Worry about such matters on your own time. Attend the fewest possible personal matters during business hours and then only when you are caught up in your work.

Arrive on time; stay until the last horn blows. You owe the job its full office hours but, if more is habitually asked of you, or if work is always piled on you just before luncheon or quitting time, then management is at fault. Talk it over with your supervisor. He may not realize the work load is too heavy.

Be dependable. Take care of yourself especially on the 5 nights weekly before the 5 work days. Avoid undue fatigue, exposure, or recreations and late hours that may impair your work capacity next day. Do not work when you have a cold that might spread to others. Do not stagger into work belatedly to sit half-sleeping most of the day because of dissipation the previous evening. You do not get paid in counterfeit money. Don't try to give counterfeit service in return.

Avoid: Talking, whistling, or singing while others are trying to work; displays of temperament; office or laboratory gossip, feuds, brawls, and scandals. Try to cultivate an attractive and friendly office personality while retaining dignity and a certain aloofness regarding wholly personal matters.

Never become a flouncer, always in a petty pet about something.

You may forge ahead while others display temperament, gossip, and fight, if you tend to business and learn as much about as many jobs as you can. Ask for more work rather than for more money; they you will surely get consideration for advancement and more money too.

Never apply for a new position saying that you rarely get in on time and take too long for luncheon, but that you will make up for it by working harder. Never say flatly you do not like to work for a woman, especially if one of your supervisors is a woman. Incredible as it seems, these things have been done.

Take leave judiciously and with due attention to your work load. Borrowing time or a streetcar pass from the boss to return the blouse or necktie you bought yesterday during an extra long lunch hour adds little to your reputation for efficiency. Taking advantage of every optional opportunity to be away from your desk regardless of the work load is unwise.

All of us:

All of us should try to evaluate ourselves periodically, to see ourselves as others see us, shocking though that be. Character is what you are, but reputation is what others think you are. We often seem eminently fair, just, wise, and agreeable to ourselves, yet may be making life miserable for others. The reputation of difficult or jittery supervisors immediately permeates the entire staff by osmosis. If we can somehow tap the office grapevine occasionally, or get some fellow worker to analyze us candidly, this is a great eye-opener. Always remember you are not to others what you sincerely believe yourself to be. Periodic stock-takings of the most ruthless and objective kind can alone enable up to appraise ourselves at our real worth and to avoid often harmless little habits that may be a great annoyance to others.

